



ON THE PROWL

STACK visited the top secret set of *Black Panther* and discovered a progressive and groundbreaking Marvel movie in the making. Words Gill Pringle

Two years after #OscarsSoWhite became the shameful hashtag of the award season, the Marvel Universe has become an unlikely ambassador of change, delivering a long overdue cinematic breakthrough in the shape of *Black Panther*.

Directed by Ryan Coogler, *Black Panther* stars some of the most talented black actors working today, featuring Chadwick Boseman as our eponymous hero alongside *Get Out*'s Daniel Kaluuya, Michael B. Jordan, *This Is Us*' Sterling K. Brown, *Letitia Wright*, *The Walking Dead*'s Danai Gurira, and Oscar-winner Lupita Nyong'o.

Rounding out the cast with veteran stars Forest Whitaker and Angela Bassett, mo-cap maestro Andy Serkis and Martin Freeman serve as rare white faces, portraying a terrorist mercenary and CIA agent, respectively.

Making his comic book debut in 1966, the Black Panther's inauguration clashed with the founding of the Black Panther Party, causing the comic's creators to distance themselves and re-name him the Black Leopard. But the title didn't stick, and he soon reverted to his original name.

A Black Panther film has been a long time in the making. Over the years, Wesley Snipes, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Anthony Mackie, Djimon Hounsou and John Boyega were all considered for the role of T'Challa, aka Black Panther, while John Singleton was previously attached to direct a version that would have seen Chiwetel Ejiofor as the lead.

More recently, Ava DuVernay was approached to direct, although her vision didn't gel with Marvel's almighty Kevin Feige and the task fell to Coogler, 31, who received early acclaim with *Fruitvale Station*, following up that success by directing Sly Stallone to a *Rocky* comeback in *Creed*.

Coogler's story opens with T'Challa returning home to the isolated, technologically advanced African nation of Wakanda, where he will succeed to the throne following the death of his father.

Fans were treated to a glimpse of the exotic nation at the end of *Captain America: Civil War*, although *STACK* ventures deeper into Wakanda when we visit *Black Panther*'s top secret set in Atlanta.

Wakanda is a century ahead of the rest of the world, thanks to the mountain of indestructible mineral Vibranium its people have been mining for centuries. The super-

BLACK PANTHER

FACTS

● *Black Panther* holds the record for the biggest first day ticket presales of any Marvel movie.

● The film's soundtrack is curated and produced by Kendrick Lamar – DAMN, HUMBLE.

● *Black Panther* will be the 18th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

● Following *Black Panther* is *Avengers: Infinity War*, which will bring everyone – Captain America, The Winter Soldier, the Falcon, Black Widow, Star-Lord, Thor, Iron Man, Spider-Man, et al – together to bring down the chaotic titan Thanos.

● *Black Panther* made his first comic book appearance in *Fantastic Four* #52 in 1966.

● Vibranium – which is mined in Wakanda and is the source of the nation's prosperity – is a 'sound-absorbing element'.

● The region of Wakanda contains a number of religious cults based on Heliopolitan gods of Ancient Egypt.

● *Black Panther* is the first black superhero to appear in American mainstream comic books, predating both Luke Cage and the Green Lantern.

● Stan Lee and Jack Kirby co-created the Black Panther.

Director Ryan Coogler and Chadwick Boseman

“**T'Challa is a complex and very real character**”

metal is used for Captain America's shield and Black Panther's bulletproof suit.

In the best shape of his life, Boseman ripples a mighty six-pack as we witness a fearsome fight scene. “T'Challa is a complicated and very real character; I have to learn an accent and a different language. It's a very emotional storyline, which is unusual for superhero movies,” says the actor who reprises his role in the next *Avengers* movie.

“There's also a lot of technology involved in playing the character, so you feel like you're in a sci-fi film too. It's interesting that he is a superhero despite the fact there is a political aspect to the movie.”

Boseman is cognisant of the importance of *Black Panther's* role in black film history. “As a black actor you always have to think about image because there's usually so many negative image choices being made on your behalf; so many ignorant choices being made because people don't realise what they're doing or what they're saying. But the luxury with this is not having to worry that it's going to look bad on black people, because we have a black director and black cast.”

The film also boasts a powerful cast of women. Bassett plays T'Challa's mother Ramonda; Wright is his sister, Shuri; and Nyong'o his lover, Nakia; while Gurira leads the Dora Milaje, Wakanda's all-female Secret Service.

With her head proudly shaven, Gurira relishes her role as Okoye. “She is sort of betrothed to the throne, so she doesn't marry; it is a very deep vocation. Not only is she head of T'Challa's national armed forces, she is also his intelligence and considered as the nation's next greatest fighter after him.”

Fighting words from Gurira, whose combat training will have fans throwing down their Wonder Woman bracelets and taking up spears instead. **G**

➔ *Black Panther* is in cinemas on February 15

